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WRITING AND REVISING A CURRICULUM GUIDE IN READING.

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THE PROCEDURES USED BY THE NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT IN THEIR REEVALUATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM ARE DISCUSSED, AND THE PHILOSOPHY WHICH GUIDED THE REWRITING OF THE TEACHING SYLLABUS IS PRESENTED. THE CONSULTANTS SELECTED FOR THE COMMITTEE WERE AUTHORS, EDITORS, DIRECTORS, EXPERTS IN THE MASS MEDIA, AND EDUCATORS REPRESENTING UNIQUE AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE WHO PROJECTED VARIOUS APPROACHES TO REVITALIZING THE LANGUAGE ARTS PROGRAM IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH GRADE 12. IN THE REVISED SYLLABUS, ATTENTION IS GIVEN TO TEACHING BOTH SKILLS AND SUBSKILLS. IT IS POINTED OUT THAT TEACHERS SHOULD TEACH SKILLS TO INSPIRE THE JOY OF READING FOR SHEER PLEASURE. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE (SEATTLE, MAY 4-6, 1967). (RH)

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Writing and Revising a Curriculum Guide in Reading

RE 000 237

Writing a Curriculum Guide
Thursday, May 4, 2:30-3:45 p.m.

Bernice T. Clark

The New York State Education Department is continually reviewing the various areas of the curriculum and has become increasingly aware of the fundamental role of language in all learning. As an important phase of the effort to provide quality education for the students of the State, a major project, the re-evaluation of the English language arts program, kindergarten through grade twelve, was undertaken.

Planning for the writing of this guide began in 1962. Consultants selected for Ad Hoc Committee on the English language arts were individuals vitally involved in the utilization of language: those who spend their professional lives writing or projecting the written word. It was considered important to hear from a group of distinguished, nationally-known authors, editors, directors and experts in the mass media and in the field of communication.

The committee meeting was characterized by the deepest interest and enthusiasm. As one reflects on the insights of the committee with respect to the goals of language and its use in education, the more convinced one is that by no other means could the more significant implications for the revision of the English program be obtained.

Under the leadership of Associate Commissioner Walter Crewson, participants from the fields of literature, the theatre, and the mass media; educators who specialize in the language arts in schools and colleges, Assistant Commissioner Warren W. Knox, and members of the Education Department staff met in Albany. Commissioner James E. Allen, Jr. met with the group for a portion of the session.

The advisory committee members were: Edward L. Bernays, public relations expert and author; Theodore Dahl, Manager, Management

Communications, International Business Machines Corporation; John Charles Daly, Columbia Broadcasting Company; William Gibson, author of "The Miracle Worker"; Rosamond Gilder, past editor of "Theatre Arts" magazine; George H. Henry, Professor of Education, University of Delaware; Robert F. Hogan, Executive Secretary, The National Council of Teachers of English; Joseph Marsand, chairman, English Department, Jamaica High School, New York City Public Schools; Mabel S. Noall, Director, Secondary Reading Clinic, Boston University; Joseph Papp, Director, New York Shakespeare Festival; Walter Pauk, School of Education, Cornell University; Louise M. Rosenblatt, Professor of English Education, New York University School of Education and Alan Schneider, Director of Broadway plays. There were also guests from colleges and members of the State Education Department.

Visiting artists and educators at the conference, in their own way and through their own creative work, symbolize projected varying approaches to revitalizing the language arts program, kindergarten through grade 12. Each member of the advisory committee represented unique and productive experience in using the medium of language with live audiences, with readers, with great segments of the public, or with students in institutions of learning.

Differing Views

Committee members challenged one another with some interesting differences of opinion. For example, there was a call for concentration on the precise study of word meaning, followed by the quick warning that excessive focus on word study per se might restrict the student's view too narrowly. There was an expert description of the careful,

systematic use of selective language geared to various publics for purposes of interpretation and persuasion, and the counter plea that language should often be used solely for sheer pleasure and enjoyment. There was a spirited dialogue on selecting and utilizing words to convey specific ideas with clarity, and the description of an ephemeral and creative process of first placing words on paper and through them, seeking to discover inner thoughts-then using the words to organize the thoughts with are discovered. There was the assertion that the program somehow misses the essence of language-feeling-or the emotional experience which can create joy in students. But there was the counter assertion that joy can only come after basic skills are mastered and that the real problem is to teach pupils the practical communication skills needed in daily life: writing a clear, descriptive paragraph, making an acceptable oral presentation. A compromise view held that the joy and the skills can be built simultaneously.

Areas of General Agreement

These were some of the rare individualisms that made the conference exciting. But the feeling of the entire group upheld such general insights and agreements as these: 1) Children come to school with motivations. Somewhere it is destroyed. Let us seek its stimulation. 2) English is not merely a subject to be taught. It is the activation of ideas. It is not mechanical; it is creative. 3) Teaching English means affecting individual behavior, for the use of language is a form of human behavior tied in with experience, including the experience of

the classroom. 4) The basic language arts program must be planned to give the increasing masses of children attending school a reasonable adequacy in the ability to communicate. 5) The syllabus will be a broad framework upon which additional plans and ideas may be built by teachers. 6) The areas in the syllabus should be carefully planned to motivate deepening interest in the language arts and to meet the realistic needs, wishes, interests and desires of youth.

Specific Recommendations

Most of the specific recommendations reflected a deep desire for creativity in the construction of the program and in the teacher's presentation, as well as a respect for the inner emotional life of the child. After a review of the existing program by Dr. Warren Knox, Dr. Walter Crewson emphasized that the Department wanted to "mine" the recommendations of the visiting artists and experts in order to "find new directions."

The Program

The group felt that the language arts program should be carefully articulated and developed in direct relation to current research which describes the nature and character of today's children. They said that interesting methods of presenting the program should be prepared for teachers in a number of creative units related to the syllabus outline, as well as a clearly organized outline of content.

The committee felt that in building the program, the following concepts and ideas should be given the most careful consideration:

1) English is not merely a subject to be taught. It is the creation and the stimulation of ideas. It is not a mechanical tinkering with structures or the analyzing of sentences out of context. It is the larger dimension of meaning and interpretation. 2) The language arts should be taught and treated as a concept designed to broaden and deepen the individuality of each learner. Language is not external; it is inextricably bound with the vitality of living. 3) The written language should be approached as something personal, tied to the way we speak. It should not become dull, impersonal and passive, resulting, in a sense, in two languages: the language of daily usage and the passive written language which uses such phrasing as "It has been announced that..." 4) Language should be used as a searchlight pointing to the inward discovery of thought and then conveyed to others after nebulous ideas are clarified. It is a tool used in inward searching, not a conveyor belt. 5) Drill without feeling is a sterile process; language can be exciting to both students and teachers. 6) The mass media can be used effectively to develop feeling and excitment related to language. 7) The theatre uses words before they come literature; it is a dramatic, graphic expression of a people, their language and their culture. The lack of theatre in many school programs often results in a long delayed introduction to this art form. Then it may come too late to attract an abiding interest. Living language is conveyed through drama, either by children's acting in plays or watching the gestures and live performances of actors. Until children observe or participate in drama, their ability to communicate will be limited.

The Student

It is felt that the inner life of the child enables him to undertake tasks which are frequently thought of as far beyond him and that the realistic inclusion of vital areas of life, too often sidestepped in the teaching process, results in the development of student confidence in teachers and deep interest in the program. The challenge was made to start with the valid inner life of the child and then lead the way to grammar and precision.

It was believed that students need to: 1) create an inner joy through language which can become a kind of food that nourishes and possesses an internal dimension. 2) learn to keep listening in its pristine state. Nourish the valuable faculty of listening attentively and thoughtfully as we did in the early stages of childhood when listening preceded the imitative process that led to speech. 3) learn to organize and convey thoughts logically, because language is a social phenomenon-an effective tool in organizing experiences, thoughts, and emotions-with a structure of its own. 4) develop the same degree of confidence in the ability to write as in the ability to speak, thus overcoming the average American's reluctance to put something down on paper. 5) learn to read critically and analytically.

The Teacher

It was agreed by all that teaching the language arts is a highly creative job and that the crux of instruction and its results rest ultimately with the enthusiasm and skill of the individual teacher.

The following recommendations were made regarding the teacher of language arts: 1) The Teacher's approach should be an inspired one. A

statewide inservice program involving the State's 13,000 English teachers should be organized. 2) A sense of greatness should be infused into our teacher preparation. 3) A lay visiting faculty of distinguished artists and practitioners in the language arts should be organized to ignite, inspire and deepen the language arts program in the high schools and in teacher training institutions. 4) Regional conferences and summer courses should be held for teachers of the language arts; and Education Department conferences should be organized for teachers of method. 5) Resource units should be prepared for teachers.

It was further suggested that a follow-up session be held with newsmen and leaders in radio and television in search of additional ideas and reactions to the recommendations of the advisory committee.

A report of the Ad Hoc Committee was reviewed by a group of representatives of the press, radio, and television at a meeting at the State Education Department in March of 1965. The meeting was chaired by Associate Commissioner Walter Crewson. The Department personnel present were: Dr. Walter Crewson, Dr. Warren W. Knox, and Dr. William E. Young.

The group stressed the importance of developing in students: 1) a mastery of and respect for language as a tool of communication with the purpose of insuring an improved and more creative use of language 2) the ability to write simple declarative sentences and to interrelate them into paragraphs which express clearly a thought of reasonable complexity 3) the ability to find joy in some type of reading. Students should be able to race, gallop, run when they read 4) the ability to express themselves clearly to peers, and conversely, the willingness to listen to a speech and the desire the see a play 5) increased interest in language and in reading through the discriminating use of television in the classroom

as a motivating force.

The study of formal grammar does not necessarily result in effective writing. However, writing tends to improve in relationship to clear oral expression and the reading of good literature.

General guidelines were set up that were translated into a working plan by a professional advisory committee the following spring. These guidelines were designed for working committees who were called into the Department the following summer to write preliminary manuscript. The professional committee was comprised of personnel from colleges and school systems-persons known to have an interest in this particular curriculum area.

This professional committee worked on the following five major areas of the syllabus revision, all K-12 in scope: 1) Reading 2) Literature 3) Language 4) Composition 5) Speaking and listening.

The working committees, one elementary, one junior high school, one senior high school, prepared initial manuscripts based on the guidelines and utilized the results of sound research to help structure syllabus.

The first portion of the developmental reading section was edited and prepared for general distribution in experimental edition. It contained locational skills, work study skills, oral reading, and rate of reading.

The reading syllabus was distributed to the schools of the State along with an invitation to chief school officers inviting districts to come into the official tryout. Many other districts and individuals indicated a desire to evaluate the materials. They were encouraged to do so. The

experimental schools were large and small-city, suburban and rural-and were located from the tip of Long Island to the Pennsylvania and Canadian borders.

Implementation

The need to implement the program was then felt in the Department. A team composed of Dr. Walter Eddington, Dr. Robert Johnstone, Dr. Vivienne Anderson and Mrs. Edna Morgan was charged with this responsibility. An orientation conference for school systems involved in try-outs was held in Albany on October 5, 1964; 150 were expected, but 300 came!

Ten regional conferences were then planned and held across the State in cooperation with local professional organizations and school districts. It is interesting to note that over 5,000 teachers, supervisors, and college professors attended these conferences.

All material K-12 in each broad skill area is within the covers of one manuscript so that all teachers can familiarize themselves closely with the complete skill development process and place youngsters on the continuum accordingly.

It is organized for ease of teacher use: 1) table of contents 2) ample blank space for comments 3) evaluation sheets at conclusion of each level in each portion of the material.

The philosophy as it appears in the introduction to the materials is explained as: "It is believed that the best way to teach reading to all children, under the circumstances that exist at the present time, is that of systematic, sequential skills development beginning in kindergarten and continuing through 12."

The purpose of this philosophy is not directed toward establishing

separate reading classes (particularly at the secondary schools), but rather it was intended to aid in the organization of instruction to the end that a sequential and systematic program of skills development will result within the existing classroom situation.

The definite trend in reading instruction in this country bears out this theory. Recent research studies indicate that the integration of these skills in current school programs is more effective than is the practice establishing separate developmental reading classes at the secondary level. Attention to reading skills in the content areas is also gaining the necessary momentum. It is also believed that the total program should make use of all reading experiences, oral and silent, that lend themselves to continued growth in major areas where reading is vital.

At various levels of development, instruction must certainly be adapted to the maturity of the student. This does not mean that skills are different, but rather that the handling of the various skills takes account of the varying maturity levels of the student.

It is recognized that corrective and remedial programs as well as provision for the gifted child will be needed in addition to this program in some cases.

Total School Program

There is a problem involved here. The elementary school cannot be expected to teach the more mature reading abilities needed in secondary school; nor can the secondary school teacher of English or the "reading period teacher" in elementary school be expected to develop in students those reading abilities needed in the study of other disciplines.

The teacher in the content area must assume the responsibility for teaching the skills that are necessary for full comprehension of the subject matter of that particular discipline. No one else knows that subject matter as well.

In summer of 1964, three 3-week workshops were conducted on the campus of Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. Literature, composition and reading sections were held with the aid of a staff of 18 consultants: a librarian, an administrator, and two college professors. One thousand New York Teachers took part (k-12) in the workshops.

The topics covered in the one-week reading section were chosen on the basis of the problems that arose in the Regional Conference and were: 1) innovations in the field of reading 2) overview of the syllabus 3) diagnosis for placement on the skills ladder 4) skills areas: content clues, vocabulary building, critical reading, study skills, 5) materials: tests, machines, visual aids, films, etc.

Each area was given K-12 attention with regard to the syllabus. For example, at all levels direct attention was given to teaching not only the skills, but the sub-skills as well (emphasis, of course, will shift at the secondary level). Teachers must teach skills, but not teach skills for skills' sake. The joy of reading for sheer pleasure must not be killed. This does not "just happen"-it must be built into the program.

The Vassar program also included: 1) well-known experts in the three areas-Durrell, Harris, and Tanyzer (i/t/a) "carried the ball" in reading. 2) recreational activities-movies, World's Fair, Tanglewood. At the same time, the initial re-writing of the syllabus was beginning on the basis of the evaluation sheets and try-out school reports. Although

there were no changes in basic philosophy, there were some changes in sequence. All skills have been carefully traced through each level and it is hoped that the revised manuscript is far superior to the experimental edition.

The New York State Education Department dreams of the day when every child in this great State will be able to read efficiently to the true extent of his abilities. The Department is working as honestly as they know how toward the day when they no longer hear of so much reading retardation. There will be problems along the way-there is no panacea. But as former Commissioner Keppel said: "Education must make good on the concept that no child is unteachable or unreachable." New York State Education Department is providing the leadership to insure that Johnny is going to read.